

PEARSALL: A MEMOIR.

BY JULIAN MARSHALL.

THE published lives of Pearsall are all so meagre and unsatisfactory that it seems worth while to put together briefly the principal facts and dates of his career, drawn from public and private sources, and not inopportune at a time when the lives of foreign artists are being exhaustively treated by very able hands.

Robert Lucas Pearsall, who afterwards assumed the particle *de* before his surname, was born on March 14, 1795, at Clifton, of an old Gloucestershire family. His father, Richard Pearsall, who died during the boyhood of his son, had held a commission in the army. His father's mother, Philippa Still, was descended from John Still, Bishop of Bath and Wells, and a composer in the reign of Elizabeth. Educated, not at a public school, but by private tutors, the boy soon manifested an enthusiastic love of music. At thirteen he had already composed a Cantata, "Saul and the Witch of Endor," which was privately printed. Much of his musical taste he inherited or acquired from his mother, Elizabeth Lucas, who used to play Corelli from a figured bass, to the boy's great delight. In deference to her wishes, he was educated for the bar, devoting, however, most of his spare time to the study of music, and some also to that of fortification, for which latter subject he had a strong bent. He showed, meanwhile, a great facility for literary composition, which enabled him to throw off a considerable number of ballads and songs which do credit to his poetical powers. In his search after everything curious relating to music he amassed a valuable collection of treatises, which were afterwards presented by one of his daughters to the Benedictine Abbey of Einsiedlen, in Switzerland. He had, besides, a talent for drawing; and, feeling always a great interest in antiquarian research, he stored up in his sketch-books a large number of illustrations of the architecture, furniture, costume, weapons, and instruments of torture, of the Middle Ages. He contributed many of the plates to Von Hefter's "Geschichte der Geräthschaften des Mittelalters."

In 1817 he married. In 1821 he was called to the bar, and for some time he went the Western Circuit; contributing in his spare moments to *Blackwood* and other publications, including some musical criticisms in the Bristol newspapers. In 1825, having had a slight attack of apoplexy, he left England for change of air, and visited Brussels, Bruges, Liège, and finally Mayence, where he remained nearly four years, associating continually with a number of friends who had musical, antiquarian, and literary tastes thoroughly congenial with his own. Here he became the pupil of Joseph Panny, an eminent contrapuntist, and began to study seriously. He composed in 1828 an overture, which was performed, and other instrumental music; and he translated Schiller's "Wilhelm Tell," into English verse, which was published in London by Bull.

In 1829 Pearsall returned to England, and stayed for more than a year at Willsbridge House, his family

seat; but he rejoined his family at Baden in 1830, and subsequently settled in Karlsruhe, for the sake of the educational advantages of that town. There he helped to found a society for the performance of sacred and other serious music by the great Italian masters, and wrote a characteristic overture to "Macbeth," introducing the "Witches' Chorus." This was performed in several places in Germany with good success, and was published by Schott in 1839. Travelling to other German towns, he met at Munich the celebrated Ett, then very old, who still preserved the traditional severe style of church music. Under this master, Pearsall acquired much of that skill which distinguishes the choral works that he subsequently composed. At Vienna he became acquainted with Kiesewetter, with whom he afterwards corresponded. Still interested in antiquarian research, he made a lengthened stay at Nuremberg, investigating the so-called "Kiss of the Virgin," a barbarous engine of torture which was formerly applied to real or suspected criminals; and on this subject he wrote an exhaustive paper, which was published by the Society of Antiquaries in London, as was also another monograph on "Judicial Combats."

In 1836 he revisited England, and heard with delight some performances of the Bristol and London Madrigal Societies. From this period date his first works in the madrigalian style; and he wrote, about the same time, a treatise in German on this kind of composition, which appeared in a German periodical. Soon after this, he sold (1837-8) Willsbridge House, to which he had succeeded on his mother's death, and resolved for the future to live abroad. In 1842 he bought the castle of Wartensee, on the Lake of Constance, and restored the ruined parts of it in 1851, after a short visit, which proved to be his last, to England. At Wartensee Pearsall wrote his largest and best musical works, some of which remain yet unpublished—"Psalmody: an Essay," 1842; a Motet in four parts, 68th Psalm, 1847; an Anthem in four parts, 77th Psalm, "Voce mea," 1849; "My heart is fixed," 57th Psalm, 1849; "Analysis of a Fugue," 1849; "Letters on Church Music," 1850; "System of Chanting," 1851; "Musica Sacra Gregoriana," 1852; "Tu es Petrus," Te Deum, "Ecce quam bonum," 1853; "Salve Regina," 1855; and that which he himself considered his *chef-d'œuvre*, a Requiem. He co-operated in the revision of the old hymn-book of St. Gall, a labour which occupied him for several years. This work—"Katholisches Gesangbuch zum Gebrauch bei dem öffentlichen Gottesdienste," 1863,—has a wide circulation to this day, and was found by one of Pearsall's daughters in use in the church at Copenhagen in 1868. His last literary work was a translation of "Faust" into English verse. Pearsall kept almost open house at Wartensee, receiving with hospitality all those who came to visit him, to converse about music, literature, or antiquarian topics, or merely to see the castle, which was architecturally interesting. His friend the Bishop of St. Gall here received him into the Roman Church.

On August 5, 1856, an attack of apoplexy carried Pearsall off in a few minutes, while apparently in the enjoyment of perfect health. He was buried on the 12th, in accordance with his own request, in a vault of the Chapel at Wartensee, and his funeral was attended by an immense concourse of people. At his death he left a widow, a son, and two daughters, the elder of whom was married in 1839 to the present Earl of Harrington, the younger, in 1857, to Mr. John Hughes, a barrister of the Inner Temple.

It is as a writer of madrigals and other choral music that Pearsall will be best remembered. There is nothing that has ever appeared, since the great days of the Elizabethan madrigalists, which ap-

proaches nearer to their excellence than the compositions of Pearsall in this manner. The simplest and slightest of his choral songs, such as "The Hardy Norseman" and "Oh, who will o'er the downs so free?" soon caught the ear of the uneducated by their easy, unaffected style; but the most cultivated musicians are no less delighted with such elaborate works as "Great god of love" (eight voices), "Light of my soul" (six voices), "Lay a garland on her hearse" (eight voices), "I saw lovely Phillis" (four voices), "In dulci jubilo" (four voices), and "Sir Patrick Spens" (ten voices). In these and many more, the educated ear is struck not only by the beautiful and natural gift of melody, but also by the massive harmonies, skilful yet lucid counterpoint, and never-failing sympathy of the music with the words. Let those who would be convinced on this last point compare his treatment of the old melody "In dulci jubilo" with that of any former master (not even excepting Bach), and Pearsall will be found to have come nearest to the true intention of both words and air.

No composer of this great merit, originality, and cultivation, should be hastily set down in the slighted category of "amateurs" merely by reason of his happening to possess some private fortune, and never writing, because never obliged to write, for gain. We have not, since Purcell's time, been able to boast of so much native genius for music that we can afford not to be glad to reckon as one of the most eminent of English composers Robert Lucas de Pearsall, the subject of this roughly sketched memoir.